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# CULTURE IN EDUCATION

By EDWIN W. FAY  
OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS



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ORGANIZATION FOR THE ENLARGE-  
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April 1, 1912.

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# CULTURE IN EDUCATION.

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BY EDWIN W. FAY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS.

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"Labor to learn,  
Lest naked fact or Mistress Reason thee confound."

The Organization for the Enlargement by the State of Texas of Its Institutions of Higher Education has done me the honor to ask me to prepare an essay for the High School pupils of Texas on The Cultural Value of Higher Education. This honor is, in one sense, a task, for a scant fortnight of time has been given me to think out what shall seem to me true and proper to say, and a great responsibility is laid upon one who must try to set you to thinking aright on a subject that will seem to you vague, but is of a vital importance for the continuation and further development of culture, which is civilization, in Texas. Is it not certain that you to whom these words are addressed will have in your hands the control and determination of cultural conditions in our State, and that you will constitute in a scant twenty years the predominant factor in our culture? This responsibility, young people of Texas, is yours, though, and not mine. In twenty years you will embody culture in Texas. Now in your youth you are to receive it, and in your maturer years to embody, maintain and foster it, when your teachers of today shall have been gathered to their fathers.

You will pardon me if I speak to you quite directly as one of your teachers. Indeed, I have no other right nor title to speak to you at all, and if I speak plainly, as one who talks to a class of maturing boys and girls, and try to make you realize by concrete examples what culture may mean to you, remember that I have been teaching and talking with intermissions to your cousins or brothers or sisters, even to the parents of some of you,

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Labora

Discere, ne te res ipsa ac ratio ipsa refellat.—(Lucilius.)

perhaps, for almost thirty years, and all the time bearing testimony to my belief in culture, and in its real value to you.

We can hardly get to the heart of our subject without first asking what culture is, and the question is so sweeping that it takes my breath away. So before we begin to define or describe culture permit me, in accord with my habits as a teacher and student of grammar, to begin, as I often do, not with the simple word, culture, but with the compound word, agriculture. What is agriculture to you, young people of Texas, as an experience? To a Louisiana boy of my intimate acquaintance it used to mean either sticking the holes, or pouring water into the holes when the sweet potatoes were planted every spring, and once it meant a whole dollar (only think!), earned by picking two hundred pounds of cotton in a town neighbor's field. Of late years it has meant no very successful attempt to get lettuce and spinach from a small garden patch. We see that working the ground and reaping its fruits is one thing meant by agriculture. That is the practice of agriculture. But next, there is the study of agriculture as they pursue it over at the Agricultural and Mechanical College, and their object there is to add science, to add theory, to practice and so to increase the yield of the farm and the efficiency of the farmer. Shall I tell you what I think of their power of service to you and me? Then let me put it in a quotation which, the comparison aside, expresses my whole thought: "And he gave it for his opinion, that whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together" (Swift, *Voyage to Brobdingnag*, II, vii).

The practice of agriculture is of all times; the science of agriculture is engaged in promoting its future development as well as its present prosperity; but there is still another aspect to regard, and that is the past of agriculture. All of you know the wonderful difference in civilization and culture between Sir Walter Raleigh and his companions on the one hand and King Powhatan and Pocahontas on the other. There may have been many points of superiority in the Indians, and they certainly knew some things, like the ceremony of the peaceful

pipe, unknown to the English gentleman, but the bulk of advantage, had they ever met, would have been on his side. His stock of knowledge, his range of ideas, his fields of enjoyment, were far the wider. History had taught him, poetry had inspired him, music and art had thrilled him more. And why? Largely because, perhaps as long as fifty thousand years before, man on the continent of Europe had begun to cultivate some of the cereals. This was for centuries upon centuries but a fitful cultivation, doubtless, like the fitful cultivation of a little transient garden-stuff and roasting-ears by the Indians, but for at least as far back as three thousand years the people to which Sir Walter Raleigh belonged by intellectual descent—I refer to the Greeks of the Homeric poems—had ceased to live as huntsmen, nomads with no abiding city, and settled down on permanent fields from whose produce they lived from year to year; and agriculture, by giving them an assured supply of food, had brought them leisure for observation and study, which are the indispensable means to culture. Thus, in a very real sense, the culture of Sir Walter Raleigh depended on the agriculture of the races preceding him, but it also depended on their mining and metallurgy, their spinning and weaving, their trading and commerce over land and over sea.

But you will be wondering what all this has to do with culture and with *us*? Well, I want you to realize that the culture we enjoy and represent is the fruit of all our past as a race, that it has depended on material elements, such as are furnished by the crops, the mines, the factories, the things that the ships and railways bring to us and carry away from us. How these things belong to culture, let us not stop now further to enquire in detail, and I am sure that it was expected of me to draw a sharp dividing line between the practical, utilitarian elements of life and the cultural. Believe me, those who draw such dividing lines are separating the inseparable. They remind me of the heirs of a certain rich man I once knew, who divided up his library among themselves so that each heir received two volumes of Grote and Gibbon and Macaulay and the rest, but none received a whole set! You wouldn't get a half-yard of cloth by raveling out all the cross threads from a whole yard, you wouldn't have any cloth left at all. How in-



finitely more complex in the weaving is man than a piece of cloth, and to educate him to perform only one service in the world is sadly to belittle his chances of larger growth. So I would not have you believe that a practical, to the exclusion of a cultural education, or a cultural education without regard for the practical, is desirable for any one of you, much less for large classes of our people. The old classical fable, employed also by St. Paul, of the debate of the members, the hands and head, the heart and stomach, and all the rest, as to which was the most important organ of man, will here come into your minds, perhaps, and, of course, the conclusion was that the members were so mutually dependent, each in its own functions, that the man was a whole and all his members essential to his well being. A headless man were scarce better suited to the right scheme of things than a cultureless education.

It is a matter of surprise that our school authorities have not realized that, instead of encouraging a war between the practical and cultural in education, pitting the one against the other, they should rather try to effect a synthesis, a compact, between these two utilities. My own practical suggestion is this, that the schools of Texas should stand open during all the long summer vacation for manual training and domestic science. By proper organization into sections every pupil, even those engaged in regular work, might have one or at most two consecutive hours several times a week for these summer courses in the practical things. Thus a fruitful opportunity to get the practical subjects would be open to every pupil, and he would learn to fulfil his part in the *doing* of the world, while from his literary and scientific training in the rest of the year his opportunity would come to fit himself to join the *thinking* forces that alone, in any real sense, make our old world move on.

Again, what do we mean by culture? In one sense the culture of the whole man. As agriculture is the intelligent working of the fields to produce a crop for the use of that social creature, man, so culture is the working of the mind to produce a profit in the man himself for society. Your teachers are the laborers, and you are his field. His task is to guide and help you in the development of your minds for the good of—yourselves, yes, but even more for the good of society. Do not belittle him and your-



selves by supposing that your high school work is not the work of culture, intended to produce the fruits of culture. Kindness and tenderness, starting long before in little acts of politeness, belong to the sweetest fruits of culture, and these should begin even to ripen in your characters long ere the high school period is past. What finer training in democracy, what better safeguard against foolish pride of class, than the equal rights and privileges of all in the public schools?

But there are different and larger aspects from which we may regard culture. Matthew Arnold, in the oft-quoted phrase from *Culture and Anarchy*, defined culture as "a study of perfection," and declared the pursuit of perfection to be "the pursuit of sweetness and light," thus adapting to his own use Swift's "winged words"—for so the Greeks described the happy phrase that flew from lip to lip of man—touching "the two noblest of things, which are sweetness and light;" but I am going to ask you now to consider culture as the sense of propriety, the sense of proportion, produced in a reasonable soul as the fruit of observation and study. Between these definitions there is no conflict, but Arnold's definition very beautifully looks at culture as a becoming, a daily growth of a grace in us as individuals, and the definition I have ventured to propose suggests rather the taking of stock on a day of the culture one has acquired. Woe for the man who, after taking stock, ceases to go on in the pursuit of perfection.

You will recognize, I think, that neither of these definitions altogether accords with the daily use of the word culture. In our everyday use we mean by culture chiefly a certain knowledge and appreciation of literature as displayed in our social intercourse, and when we apply the word cultured to a man we further imply that he has some breeding, or at least tolerable manners, and dresses neatly. To wear proper clothes and to exhibit good manners are the all but indispensable marks of culture, and in including these elements in their conception of this term, the public conforms to our definition of culture as the sense of propriety produced in a reasonable soul as the fruit of observation and study.

But no matter what a word ought to mean, it must and does mean what people mean by it. How far are people right, then,

in the feeling that literary appreciation exhibited in the ability to talk about books constitutes a predominant part in culture? In a historical sense they are absolutely right. The ability to talk intelligently about books has passed as the mark of culture for over two thousand years. Only the other day the author of that popular novel, *Queed*, in order to show the lack of breeding in a man trying to make his way into a cultured society, made him talk about Byron's—instead of Bryant's—*Thanatopsis*. Time out of mind this sort of literary blunder has been jeered at in novels and on the stage. The novelist Petronius, one of the courtiers of Nero, made a butt of a man who blundered and blundered in his talk about Homer, and Socrates used to confound the vain and pretentious by making them realize that they did not know the meaning of the fine words that they rolled from their tongues. Without trying to go further back, let us say that ever since the time of Socrates (450 B. C.) the verdict of uncultured has been pronounced upon a man because of mispronunciations, bad grammar, the misuse of words, and the lack of appreciative acquaintance with some good literature.

If no definition of a word or of an ideal is valid that does not reckon with the common and ordinary use of the word, the common and ordinary conception of the ideal, does the definition of culture that I have offered include the common and ordinary acceptance of that term? What, in short, is the demand we make upon the cultured in their social intercourse save insistence upon the exhibition of the sense of propriety in their dress, their manners and their conversation—laying an especial emphasis in conversation on the element of literary appreciation? Other subjects of cultured conversation are music, art, and even science, but these are rather special topics, not demanded of all, but esteemed as an added grace in some.

Can we justify the inclusion of literary appreciation in the ordinary acceptance of the term culture, or is it a mere inheritance of the ages? I think we can justify it if we but reflect that culture is a social product, that speech is our means of social intercourse—which should make us wish to have our grammar neat and fine—and that recorded speech, after selection has

done its work of choosing the good and refusing the bad, is literature.

In the last few decades a sort of quarrel has arisen against the insistence on literature as an indispensable element in culture, and the scientists have put up science for first place. An ivory ruler on my desk (unless it is "scientific" celluloid) quotes Agassiz as saying, "Study nature, not books." I bow in honor to the great Agassiz, but if this sentence, presented all out of its context, be taken literally, it is rank foolishness. Rather say, "Study nature out of doors and study nature in books;" and, above all, remember that books, that literature, are a natural work of man, nature's dominant production. Of Agassiz himself it might be most truthfully said, "He studied nature to write books," and future students of nature would be very foolish to restudy, out of doors, those questions of natural history that Agassiz studied and settled, instead of learning at second hand from Agassiz what he learned direct from nature, saving time enough thereby to go on with new nature study in and out of doors.

When I speak of scientists I have in mind friends of my own whom I highly esteem, and science, too, however dense my ignorance of it, I esteem highly, but I cannot understand the solicitude of my friends to extort an admission that science is culture, any more than I could understand the demand of an ear of wheat, for all its utility and structural beauty, to be ranked as a flower. Science is a utility, doubtless the greatest utility now active for the advance of mankind, but ought science to take the place of literary appreciation as a touchstone of culture? Ought talk about science to take the place now held in the social intercourse of the cultured by talk about literature? Ought a general or particular knowledge of science to replace in the cultured their general and particular knowledge of literature? Suppose I say to you that talk about science is not as universally appropriate in society as talk about literature? Suppose I say that science is much more useful to society than literature? Do I confuse you? Do you not realize that there is no contradiction here, since the word society means entirely different things in each of these assertions? What is literature? Well, for our present purpose, it is a comment on life, and

literary appreciation, literary comment, is far and away the most suitable general interest upon which society can have its say. Sooner or later literature embodies all the great scientific truths capable of being understood by persons not technically trained in the various branches of science. The theory of evolution, with its special aspects of heredity and natural selection, adaptation to environment and survival of the fittest; the law of gravitation and the theories of planetary formation; Mendeléeff's law of the serial proportionality of the chemical elements; Mendel's law of the proportion of the maternal, paternal and remoter inheritances in (plant and) animal descent—these and the like generalizations of science become matters of general interest after they become matters of general knowledge. In all such things the cultured man must interest himself, but this general knowledge of his is vague and not precise, it is an estimate and not a count, and neither the methods nor the exactitudes of science are likely ever to form a staple in the conversation of the cultured.

Undoubtedly conversation furnishes the widest field for the display and exercise of culture, and conversation is the finest flower of social life. Let us institute a contrast between the telephone and *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* as topics of conversation in society, the one scientific, the other literary. The utility of the telephone might call for a few commonplace remarks, but the science behind it, the laws of electricity and of acoustics, the conductivity of the wires, the vibrations of the diaphragm—society will never learn enough science to talk about these things. How will society talk about *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*? Chiefly, and only for the year or two of its vogue, by asking, "have you read it?" and, "how did you like it?" and by answering, "it's perfectly lovely," or, "it's very sweet"—which is not very discerning talk on the part of society, but then society is not, never has been, very discerning (alas!). But to some this tale of a Christmas reconciliation of lovers accidentally brought about by the kind and cheerful Mrs. Wiggs, whom one, or was it both, of the lovers had befriended, might suggest other literature of kindness, and so the conversation would pass on to Dickens' Christmas stories, and suggest, in the delightful desultory way of conversation, a thousand thoughts



of kindness and sympathy, and how if we cast that bread upon the waters it is promised that it shall return to us after many days. But the great fear is that in American society, before our hearts warmed up, some loud-voiced man would break in with a well-worn joke about some Mrs. Biggs of his acquaintance who was a mother-in-law, and the company would go off into a guffaw in recognition of our national gift of anecdote-mongering by conversational monopolists which has made many senators and other statesmen, but, joining hands with pink teas and yellow receptions, has done its worst to ruin the gentlest, finest art, conversation.

I would not have you regard me as wishing myself to insist on the preponderance of literary topics in the conversation of the cultured. I am but telling you that society actually recognizes literary topics as the chief staple of the talk of the cultured. This has gone on for centuries and as, all the while, literature has grown and grown, you may well ask how is a mere human lad in the days of his schooling to get a large enough insight into literature to qualify him for cultured conversation. Not by trying to scratch all the wide garden of literature with a curry-comb, but by digging a few deep holes in certain of the garden plots. You will have help here from the school. Each year of your high school life a certain number of the best English books is given you to read. They are chosen because they are the best; because they are the masterpieces in their departments of literature. Try and master them, or some of them. They are the English classics. Above all, try to acquire an appreciation of poetic form and poetic thought. Believe me, if you would inform your reasonable souls with the best thought of the ages, with the profoundest application of principles to conduct, the highest appreciation of the beautiful and the good, study the poets, for they will show you how

He most lives

Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.

(Philip James Bailey's *Festus*.)

And read as widely as you can before you are twenty. It is hard to find time for it afterward. But choose your reading

well, and choice should mean for most of you the acceptance of the choice of others. What the qualified choose are the classics, whether they call them *The Hundred Best Books* or *The Five-foot Shelf*. Such lists, prepared for each separate department of literature as history, epic, drama, oratory, the Greeks severally called the canon. In literature study the canon, the masterpieces. This will qualify you to take your part in the conversation of the cultured. Such canons I wish we might even formally adopt for ourselves, to save to society a common field of culture, and to prevent society from an undue appreciation of the transient "best-sellers," including such fleeting bits of somewhat oversweetened sentiment as *Mrs. Wiggs*. Realize that in the canon age would have the advantage over youth, the old that has won the approval of the ages over the new. Conceivably Rostand, the author of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, might write as good a play as Shakespeare, but centuries must pass ere a *Cyrano de Bergerac* can rank in the canon with *King Lear*. This is the advantage that the classics, and I do not hesitate to include the Greek and Latin classics, must enjoy over contemporary literature in vogue for today. We must read the classics if we would acquire taste, which is judgment, in literature.

We are now come to a point where we may define the cultured man somewhat more briefly than heretofore, taking still some account of culture in the wider sense, but still more account of "culture" as commonly understood: the cultured man is the exponent of propriety in conversation—but you must understand conversation, in its wider and more nearly original sense, of all the various aspects of social intercourse. To put it concretely and categorically, as a teacher to his pupils, you will exhibit culture, young people, by going suitably dressed, by having good manners and sincere, and by fitting yourselves to take part in conversation about the choicer matters of general interest.

As future members of society you will ask yourselves how the individual is to fit himself into the organism of society as one of its myriad elements. You may think of society as a mighty engine of untold parts, bolts and rods, pistons and valves, cranks and eccentrics, and a thousand more. What each little crank in the engine has to do is keep in motion, revolving in its



own marked path. What each of you has to do is the work that lies immediately to his hand. Here you have the widest play for individualism. Your immediate work, young people, is to perform the round of school duties in a fine spirit, realizing that they are your preparation for the next stage in life. And, to take up for once a moral aspect of culture, you will count among your school duties submission to authority, and will realize that it is better for you silently to suffer a possible injustice at the hands of some teacher than to encourage in your parents and other school children's parents resistance to discipline. Has not all the experience of the world shown that resistance to discipline, often the resistance to unjust discipline, even, on the part of the grown-ups, has been the ruination of youthful character, as well as of the character of the schools? Believe me, it is well to remember how Jesus, who came into the world to save us from our natural instincts, expressly warned us to resist not evil.

In acquiring a fitness for your part in cultured society, above all you will particularly resist not grammar, which is the science of the word. By the study of words your sense of propriety in speech will be made such that never again will a large or a small church in Texas have chiselled on its corner-stone The Blank Avenue Church *née* The Blank Street Church; and in the days of your maturity the society "editresses" will know that Mrs. John Smith was not *née* Miss Belle Jones, but was *née* [a little girl baby whose father's name was] Jones. It will come to be understood in your day, too, that it is not manners to talk of Reverend Jones, but rather to speak of him as The Reverend Mr. Jones, or The Reverend John Jones, or The Reverend Dr. Jones, as the circumstances may admit.

I have dwelt too long, perhaps, on the current conception of culture as propriety in dress, manners and conversation, with very slight indications here and there of how you may study these proprieties at school, and now I want to hurry on to the special turn to be given to your cultural education in case you go to college or University, but I must pause a moment to warn you that with our characteristic American impropriety in the use of words we have degraded the name University so that a true definition based on the greater number of usages would be some-

thing like this: "*University*, often in America, a pretentious poor college."

When you leave the high school for college you should feel that you are advancing further toward the goal of culture, gaining further equipment for service, for doing your work in the world, taking part in the world's work. But you must feel the need of equipment for service whether you go to college or not. A high school graduate has already enjoyed a good deal of culture, enough to enable him to go forward, not so fast, perhaps, but yet to go forward on the path of culture, without a teacher.

How will your college education differ from your high school education? Not so much the first year or two, and yet the whole difference will be sharp. In the high school the task is chiefly to learn the things whose certainty is beyond doubt, things about which there is little room for difference of opinion; in a word, facts, or supposed facts. As your education goes on facts will still hold a preponderant part, but theory, which is the interpretation of the facts and their adjustment to other facts in the great cosmic order, will play an ever larger and larger part. In the discussions of theory into which you will be taken at college you will have occasion to develop your sense of propriety in forming judgments, in placing estimates upon matters of controversy. There, even though your greatest profit may still arise from the study of facts, you will come into contact with those whose position as specialists may inform you anew with the spirit of culture. There you will find teachers filled with enthusiasm for truth, the new truth that completes the old, and the truth shall set you free. Alas, we are all born into this world as slaves, slaves to remote ancestral tendencies, to savage and animal tempers and desires, to the ignorant prejudices and crass beliefs that cast Galileo into prison; gave Socrates the poisoned cup of hemlock, lifted up Jesus to the cross. From this enslavement only the truth shall set us free, and it is the province of the specialist scholar to find for himself, and then for us, the truth. Because there are now and again silly specialists who never have caught the vision of truth, there have been silly college presidents to deify specialists, and to cry up—amateurs, I suppose. But it is from the tuition of men who are disinterested seekers after truth, not engaged in promoting special

privileges and furthering special interests, investigators, it may be, nay, it must be, of only some little crank or piston in the great machine of the cosmos, that we are to catch the spirit of truth-seekers. Only such men will show us that principles are of more account than men, that society, which is the whole, has a greater claim upon us than ourselves, who are but a part. Such men will perhaps convince us that after satisfying the primal needs of food, clothing and shelter for our bodies our next duties are to society; that the habit of thinking justly and feeling nobly, those choice and high fruits of culture, not only mean more for society, but actually bring more of enjoyment to ourselves than absorption in money-getting or "boosting prosperity." Yet the higher good does not exclude the lower good. The attainment of knowledge and its transmutation into culture, which is the refined fruit of knowledge in our reasonable souls, will not exclude, nay it must not exclude, a due regard for the practical. See that you do not let the practical, the merely utilitarian, warp your souls away from the pursuit of the true and the beautiful and the good, which is, and nothing else is, culture.

#### APPENDIX.

(A note on culture prepared at my request by one of my pupils, Mr. Richard Harrison:)

#### CULTURE.

To give one culture is to develop, by any legitimate means, the best that is in him. To accomplish this, all inherent tendencies that oppose the development of these qualities should be assiduously inhibited, and all liability to the acquirement of habits not conducive to the proper development of them should be forestalled. The process will of necessity involve rigorous, as well as tender treatment. Let me illustrate by my father's work in his orchard. He delights in growing large, symmetrical, well-colored, deliciously flavored peaches. He does this by proper attention to plowing, pruning, spraying—in fact, by any treatment, severe or tender, that will give him the best devel-



oped fruit. To give a child—and this includes grown-ups—the right kind of “culture,” is to act on the same principle. With him a “healthy body is necessary to a sound mind” and an amiable disposition; hence it should have proper exercise, and proper protection from noxious disease. For the mind, or intellect, to be strong, it needs rigorous discipline; discipline, however, that will stimulate to search for learning (*humanitas*) for learning’s sake. Finally, strength from a social and moral standpoint comes from contact with one’s fellows. Here, again, it is necessary for the pleasant and unpleasant experiences to have their proportionate sway; the pleasant gives the exhilaration that buoys up, and keeps one filled with wholesome inspiration; the unpleasant broadens one’s sympathy, makes him more tolerant, and rids him of selfishness. It is thus, it seems to me, that true “culture” is attained.

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